



ABORIGINAL CULTURE OFFERS ENVIRONMENTAL WISDOM

Dr. IFSHA KHURSHID

Assistant Professor, Post Graduate Department of Economics, Vinoba Bhave University.

Introduction :

Development is considered to be essential for a nation or region to obtain economic efficiency. Use of natural resource is necessary for process of development, but it must not compromise the security of present and future generation. Environmental degradation is the price paid for human development. The present mode of development threatens societies both in the present and as well as future. Environmental resources are being openly destroyed on a colossal scale in search for endless economic growth. Mostly present day urban development is based on unsustainable environmental practices resulting in endangered species, land, air and water pollution and destruction of entire eco system.

On the other hand traditional aboriginal culture teaches that traditional environmental management science resulting in long term ecological health is the fundamental requirement for survival that humans are an integral part of the ecology and that self restraint is necessary for the well being of the community. The 'Aboriginal Culture' may have compounding factors such as lower quality of water, health care and economical backwardness but despite being poor in physical infrastructure building they are rich in cultural infrastructure and environmental wisdom. These traditional societies are aware of the importance of natural resources.

Objective :

The objective of this paper is to explain and recognize the importance of aboriginal culture and accept their way of thinking, their knowledge, their perception, to be scientific and practical that has a definite set of environmental wisdom. It is the need of time to realize, accept and learn from the ways of nature and the scientific knowledge of traditional people, along with their deep ecological wisdom. The pursuit of economic growth at all costs is not only destructive for aboriginal culture but also has a long term destructive effect on the modern civilizations. The effect of these developments is apparently observed through sudden climate changes, frequent occurrences of natural disasters at various places throughout the world.

Within a century or two of modern civilization has caused a remarkable damage to the landscapes. Perhaps it were the 'traditional civilization' who were termed as 'backward and barbaric' have more civilized attitude towards nature than the modern inhabitants and it is we who are 'barbaric' towards our own environment.

To understand the ability of aboriginal's environmental wisdom and their perspective towards respecting nature and maintaining ecological balance we need to make a comparative study of present modern civilization and the traditional civilization practices and restores by aboriginal's worldwide.

This comparative study gives an insight to demarcate and understand which civilization practices a better scientific and sustainable attitude of development.

Modern Technological Culture Vs. Aboriginal's Traditional Culture :

1. The aboriginal life were not without difficulties. It was a life of struggle, hunger, occasional quarrels and bloodshed. It was a life in which all can participate without a division into a few who admired and the rest who look on. It was a life of hard work and lean moments even though it restores a great beauty of living close to the nature and punctuated by an annual rituals and cultural values that gave meaning to their everyday existence.

Today the present civilization with all its development, modernization and sophistication at the best of its ability, with a society that contains enormous capacity is heading towards its own destruction although it holds the resources that can fuel the transformation projects but its unable to satisfy the greed of never ending desire. These traits were missing in aboriginal culture making it more scientific and practical.

2. Today we expect more depletion of resources in future economically, more ideological distortions sociologically, extreme climatic disorders, aggravated ecological imbalance. Today we live in the '*me*' culture and we are left alone. With the full stomach people are left with empty soul.

On the contrary the aboriginal culture was a more self contended culture where the economic efficiency were never obtained at the cost of ecological deficiency. It was based on '*we*' culture that tied them into society, nature and the cosmos. They might have remained empty stomach but their soul was opulent with the spirit of oneness.

The present modern culture which so prides itself on its ability to predict – failed to predict its own consequences while traditional culture saw where it would lead. Over use of non renewable natural resources are leading to severe scarcity of essential basic resources needed for survival like land, air and water. The failure of industrial society's to predict the consequences of their technology is directly related to the mechanical/ materialist worldview in which that technology was developed-a world view fundamentally different from the organic worldviews of traditional people.

The traditional aboriginal people were good at crisis management and were good at predicting their future and hence followed a pattern of sustainable development. They understood the importance of forest, water and natural resources in their lives so they respected it for their own existence.

3. The modern worldview of the conquering industrializing cultures held that the universe is fundamentally lifeless, with life happening by accident on the surface of this planet. In this view, which we have deeply explored the role of science to study nature objectively-The purpose of science is to gain control over nature by exploiting it for human purposes-converting it to food production and the manufacture of goods to improve life. Development is thus focused on material production.

As per the aboriginal perspective, the universe, nature is alive and sacred. All components of Universe; the stars, the rocks, the waters, the winds, the creatures, the people, the spirits are elated and interdependent and the human role is to hold nature sacred and to live in a balanced way within it, to give back as much as is taken while pursuing social and spiritual development. There is no concept of waste and waste accumulation.

4. Modern culture is objective and quantitative and is based on an academic and literate transmission. It isolates its objects of study from their vital context by putting them in simplified and controllable experimental environments- which also means that scientists separate themselves from nature.

On the other hand the traditional aboriginal culture which is mainly subjective and qualitative which is often passed on orally from one generation to the next. Their knowledge always depends on its context and particular local conditions. (Nakashima& Roue 2002). This not only helps these traditional culture to preserve ecological balance but they are also among the one who has the ability to adapt the change.

5. The new industrial society is based on the conviction that man is a master and would bring about a Golden Age by conquering, subduing and transforming nature to its own ends.

Aboriginal culture on the other hand taught people to be humble about their place in nature, to accept the supremacy of nature and respect it to ensure their own existence.

Usually aboriginal culture is termed as backward and ignorant, unfortunately traditional histories are generally known not through their people, own telling but by anthropological reports. Divorcing the modern economy's perspective to measure the growth in terms of money the traditional culture measures the growth in terms of happiness. The traditional aboriginal culture is thus participating- fostering dialogue between humans and the rest of nature. It is taught to all people not as something learned in limited years of schooling, but as a lifelong task. The value of aboriginal culture could be seen in their way of thinking, their knowledge and their perceptions which is totally scientific and practical applicable to all times. Because we are accustomed to relate science and technology with mechanized instruments, machinery and all the material products of our culture, it is

difficult for us to grasp the enormous scientific and technological prowess of people who consciously and deliberately kept their material goods to a minimum in order to live in ecologically sound ways. For eg: An '*Adivasi*' child may know to distinguish literally hundreds of species of bees by their appearance and behavior without going through a formal years of schooling, this knowledge is passed to him through his family that's being passed over to them through generations. A traditional person could be well aware of knowledge and psychology of traumas, illness and medicines through the practices carried out through generations. They are well aware and equipped of several medicinal plants and roots which can cure almost all the diseases of modern times. The hunter tribe is technically sound to make their own weapons and safeguard them even at the odd circumstances.

Aboriginal people have a rich culture involving a custom and value system based on the sustainability of their spiritual connection, belonging, obligation and responsibility to care for their land, their people and their environment. Their intimate knowledge of the natural resources and eco systems of their areas, developed through long and sustained contact and their respect for their spirits which inhabit these places, mould their life on the land. This knowledge is derived from aboriginal's people experience in living for centuries in close harmony with land. It means knowing the natural environment and its resources, the use of natural resources and the relationships of people to the land and to each other.

Therefore Aboriginal cultural knowledge can be defined as "accumulated knowledge which encompasses spiritual relationship, relationships with the natural environment and the sustainable resources and relationships between social organization, values, beliefs and cultural laws and customs." Unlike the written word, aboriginal cultural knowledge is not static but responds to change through absorbing new information and adapting to its implications. Aboriginal culture is bequeathed through oral traditions (song, story, art, language and dance) from generations and embodies and preserves the relationship to land.

The importance of this traditional knowledge for the protection of biodiversity and the achievement of sustainable development is slowly being recognized internationally (*Gadgil et al 1993*) *United Nations (1992) convention on Biological Diversity (with Annexes)* NO 30619. *Rio de Janeiro, Brazil United Nations.*

Article 8 of the convention on Biological Diversity urges us to—"respect, preserve and maintain knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional ;lifestyles relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity (*United Nations 1992*).

In addition, traditional or indigenous knowledge has been rediscovered as a model for a healthy interaction with and use of the environment and as a rich source to be tapped into in order to gain new perspectives about the relationships between human and nature.

At present, traditional ecological knowledge is interpreted as a cumulative body of knowledge, practices and representations that describes the relationships of living being with one another and with their physical environment, which evolved by adaptive processes and has been handed down through generations by cultural transmission. (*Barkes et al 2000*)

Many traditional population have relied for centuries on their direct environment for subsistence and anatomy. Over time they have learnt to manage and use their resources that ensures their conservation into the future. These traditional societies are interested more in preserving their own social, cultural and environmental stability and integrity than in maximizing production. Consequently there is no exploitation of nature- as their way of life is based on a strong sense of interconnection and interdependence.

Traditional knowledge has developed a concept of the environment that emphasizes the symbiotic character of human and nature. It offers an approach to local development that is based on the evaluation with the environment and on respecting the carrying capacity of eco systems. This knowledge- based on long term empirical observation adapted to local conditions- ensures a sound use and control of the environment and enables indigenous people to adapt to environmental changes. Moreover, it supplies much of the world's population with the idea to fulfill their basic needs, and forms the basis for decision and strategies in many practical aspects including interpretation of meteorological phenomena, medical treatment, water management, production of clothing, navigation, agriculture and husbandry, hunting and fishing, and biological classification systems. (*Nakashima and Roue, 2002*)

It provides humanity as a whole with new biological and ecological insights, it has potential value for the management of natural resources, and might be useful in conservation education as well as in development planning and environmental assessments. (*The World Conservation Union 1986*)

Western science favors analytical and reductionist methods as opposed to the more intuitive and holistic view often found in traditional knowledge. It is positivist and materialist in contrast to traditional knowledge, which is spiritual and does not make distinctions between empirical and sacred (*Nakashima and Roue, 2002*)

Science is defines by *Merriam Webmaster's Collegiate Dictionary* as : *The state of knowing*" This definition certainly includes the traditional knowledge. They respected the value of nature and forest and their knowledge of understanding was scientific.

As per *Oxford Dictionary*, Science is the " *State of knowing* " and its is concerned either with a connected body of demonstrated truths or with observed facts and trustworthy methods for the discovery of new truth within its own domain. On the basis of this definition the aboriginal people acquire scientific knowledge through observation experiment and theoretical explanation in a framework of natural law. While in modern culture the science is done in a " Low context environment" isolating phenomena to study them outside their natural context, in a laboratory. While in aboriginal people are more scientific in a high context environment" studying phenomena within their natural context.

While both the cultures practiced their own pursuit of knowledge based on real observation and experiment, the modern culture removes phenomena from their natural context to study them in laboratories because he seeks knowledge enabling him to control nature for his own purposes, while the traditional aboriginal culture leave what he learns in place because he seeks knowledge that will permit him to integrate himself harmoniously into nature.

Conclusion :

Only now when we are in critical danger do we look back to understand the history of aboriginal cultures as well as of whole ecosystems, to build the technological world- as world in which nature has been seen only as a supply base and a dumping ground, a polluted world which testifies to the modern culture's failure to respect the aboriginal's sacred earth wisdom. A world we now recognize as unsustainable.

The current Canadian Budget 2016 also realizes the importance of the indigenous knowledge in maintaining and preserving environment and hence special privilege is given to the 'Renewing the Urban Aboriginal Strategy' and to renew \$ 23.7 million of the Urban Aboriginal Strategy's , \$ 51 million per year funding is allocated. There is a need for such realization and incorporation of policies at Indian Platform also.

It is the high time for us to realize, understand and implement the ways of nature and to learn the scientific knowledge of aboriginal culture, with their deep ecological wisdom. This paper does not argues to prove the supremacy of aboriginal culture over the modern technological culture, rather the solution lies in the Co-operation between Aboriginal traditional culture and modern technological culture based on mutual respect for each other. It can help us to identify destructive technologies and make useful technological ecologically sound set up to save our planet and the whole mankind. It can lead advances in our knowledge of how the universe and our own planet create themselves and function. The modern times knowledge is inventive, genius, enormous and capable of solving the greatest problems we face, if it is augmented by the traditional aboriginal's deep knowledge and wisdom and respect towards nature.

REFERENCES:

1. Bateson G (1979) *Mind and Nature, A necessary Unity*. New York, NY, USA Dutton
2. Berkes F (1993) Traditional Ecological Knowledge in perspective. In Inglis JT (ed) *Traditional Ecological Knowledge : Concepts and Cases*, pp 1-9, Ottawa, Canada, International Programs on Traditional Ecological Knowledge and International Development Research Centre.
3. Berkes F , Colding J, Folke C (2000). Rediscovering of Traditional Ecological Knowledge as Adaptive Management. *Ecol Appl(10 : 1251- 1262)*
4. Bertus Haverkort, Katrein Van't Hooft and Wim Hiemstra (eds.) *Ancient Roots, New Shoots : Endogenous Development in Practice*.
5. Boojh, R. 2003. Is Sustainable World Possible ? *Connect*, 28, 7-10, UNESCO Paris.
6. Capra, F. 1983. *The Turning Point. Science, Society and the Rising Culture*. Flamingo London.
7. Gadgil M, Barkes F, Folke C (1993), Indigenous Knowledge for Biodiversity Conservation *Ambio* 22 : 151-156
8. Guha, R (Ed). 1994. *Social Ecology*. Oxford University Press. New Delhi, India.
9. Nakashima D, and Nilsson A. 2006. *Linking Biological and Cultural Diversity : Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (LINKS) Project*. Pp 385-388. In : Petitjean P, Zharov V, Glaser G, Richardson J, De Pardirac B and Archibald G.(eds) 60 years of Science at UNESCO 1945-2005, UNESCO, Paris.
10. Nakashima DJ, Roue M (2002) *Indigenous Knowledge, peoples and Sustainable practice*. In Timmerman P (ed) *Encyclopedia of Global Environmental Change*. 5 : Social and Economic Dimensions og Global Environmental Change, pp 314-0324, Chichester, UK : Wiley.
11. Schaff T, 1996. *Sacred Groves- Environmental Conservation Based on Traditional Beliefs*. In, *Culture and Agriculture*, UNESCO, World Decade for Cultural Development, Paris
12. United Nations (1992) *Convention on Biological Diversity (with Annexes)* No 30619, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil : United Nations.
13. United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (2002) *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*, Paris, France : UNESCO.